Domestic Ethnography, Diaspora and Memory in *Baba 1989*

Nariman Massoumi

This chapter offers some insights into the practice and function/s of documentary filmmaking within a diasporic, domestic context based around the short documentary *Baba 1989* (2016), produced as part of my practice-as-research thesis on diasporic, domestic ethnography in documentary film practice. Domestic ethnography is a term introduced by Michael Renov (2004) to describe the complex intersubjective interaction that takes place in documentary films that engage the participation and involvement of the filmmaker's family members. My research is interested in what happens to this relationship in the context of diasporic displacement. The subjects of my short documentary films are my parents and family members, their memories of displacement from Iran and their/our experience as Iranians living in Britain. Consequently, the research is situated within the specificity of the Iranian diaspora, that is the communities of Iranians that have settled in cities across the globe following their displacement and dispersal predominantly in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the subsequent Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988.

Baba 1989 documents my father's personal memories of arriving in Britain in 1989, following four years of separation from the rest of the family. His personal testimony is juxtaposed with a family home video playing and repeating on a TV monitor, occasionally faltering and dropping out. The film provides a useful case study for examining some of the interactions that take place between family archive, domestic ethnography and diasporic subjectivity. In what follows, I introduce domestic ethnography as conceived by Renov then discuss its role within a diasporic setting drawing on the experience of making *Baba 1989,* reflecting on the role of the home video in the film, as well as on the function of the film itself within and beyond the family.

Domestic ethnography

As a film that uses personal testimony and home video, *Baba 1989* is situated within the autobiographical mode of documentary practice. For Michael Renov, the resurgence of the autobiographical mode in the last two decades has not only reinvented the 'very idea' of documentary film, but has returned it to its historically suppressed roots (2008b, 49). Films such as Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and Joris Ivens' *Rain* (1929) evidence the presence of self-expression in the early decades of documentary (2004, p.xvii) and illustrate how the objectivity of documentary has always been tied up with the subjectivities of the filmmaker and his or her recording apparatus. The uncertainty and instability of autobiography has, via film's indexical relationship to the material world, presented documentary's claims to objectivitity with an uncomfortable paradox. Indeed, 'in the very awkward simultaneity of being subject *in* and subject *of*', argues Alisa Lebow, the first person film (to use her umbrella term) 'unsettles the dualism of the objective/subjective divide, rendering it inoperative' (2012, p.5). Unstable subjectivity is what makes first person films at once so intriguing yet so difficult to define.

This difficulty is pertinent when trying to distinguish the specificity of first person films where the subject of the documentary is the filmmaker's own family member or kin. In what ways, we might ask, do these films remain within, and/or depart from, the autobiographical? In making sense of my own film practice involving family members, I have found Renov's formulation of 'domestic ethnography' most useful. Domestic ethnography is, for Renov, an extension of the autobiographical, a form of self-portraiture and self-discovery, a 'means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familial Other' (2004, p.218), starting from the notion that 'ethnography begins in the home' (2004, p.xiii). As a form of participant observation, domestic ethnography cannot be reduced exclusively to self-inscription yet, like other autobiographical documentary films, it continues to problematise the authoritative claims to objectivity of traditional documentary ethnography. This is due to the fact that, as the family-tie entails a reciprocity and interplay between filmmaker and subject, self and other, any solely 'outside' position is rendered

impossible. ‘Self and other are simultaneously if unequally at stake’ in this unique intersubjective mode of enquiry (2004, p.219).

For Renov, the anthropological characteristic of domestic ethnography arises from calling ‘attention to the dynamics of family life as the most fundamental (which is not to say universal) crucible of psychosexual identity’. Whatever it tells us about culture and society ‘it does so in miniature’ (2004, p.229). The anthropologist’s research into ‘the “otherness” of foreign cultures’ is, in domestic ethnography, converted into a ‘familiar or domesticated frame of reference’ (2008a, p.56). In this way, domestic ethnography presents ‘yet another response’ to the ‘ethnographic impasse’ (2004, p.218) and the representational problems that have haunted anthropology due to its colonial associations. Through a distinctive intersubjective negotiation of the self/other dichotomy, domestic ethnography can problematise the traditional objectifying practices of anthropological documentary film.

The reversal of the anthropological gaze was, after all, the impulse behind ‘autoethnography’, coined by Mary Louise Pratt as an oppositional term in response to the historical European subjugation of others in ethnographic representation (Lebow, 2008; Russell, 2009). Autobiography becomes ethnographic in film and video, according to Russell, ‘at the point where the film or videomaker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes’ (1999, p.276). Lebow (2008) concurs but places the emphasis not on filmmaker intentionality but in the productive act of readership. That is, one can productively read an autobiographical film as autoethnographic (2008: p.xv). Similarly, the ethnographic currency of domestic ethnography can be drawn out discursively through the act of viewing, reflection and writing, as various scholars have shown in the study of their own domestic family photographs and cultural artefacts (Barthes, 1981; Hirsch, 1997; Kuhn, 2002). What these works also demonstrate is that autoethnography and domestic ethnography are far from discrete practices but rather intimately related. It is rare to write about (or to film) one’s own family members without reference to the self and vice versa - domestic ethnographies are as much biographies as they are

autobiographies (Lebow, 2008, p.39). Yet their close interrelation has meant that critics have tended to regard them as one and the same. But if in autoethnography 'cultural concerns are explored or displayed through the representation of the self' (2008, p.xv), in domestic ethnography those concerns are explored vicariously through the representation of the family member. In this sense, domestic ethnography is autoethnography once removed.

Diasporic domestic ethnography

Given this unique approach to the self/other dichotomy, I will now consider what the implications are for the practice and function of domestic ethnography in a diasporic context. If domestic ethnography offers its own unique intersubjective response to 'othering' what happens when the domestic encounter is additionally framed by an exploration of cultural identity and difference?

One specific characteristic of diasporic domestic ethnography is that of a second generation filmmaker exploring the lives and memories of older generations. In my films and in those of other diasporic domestic ethnographers, such as Richard Fung, Rea Tajiri and Mona Hatoum, the parent or grandparent becomes a vehicle through which to explore questions of cultural and national identity, as they 'embody a particular cultural history of displacement or tradition' (Russell, 1999, p.278). Here the domestic encounter is both intercultural and intergenerational and driven by the excavation and preservation of memory. For example, in *Italianamerican* (1974), Martin Scorsese interviews his parents in their home about their memories of their ancestors and displacement as Sicilian immigrants in New York. The recording of his parents' memory is intimately tied up with retaining the history of the Italian-American community (hence the unhypeninated fusion of the two nationalities in the title of the film). What drives the concerns behind such films is the fear of loss of memory and identity. As Daniela Berghahn argues in her study of European diasporic family film, the domestic ethnographer's search for identity and knowledge through the 'familial Other' is in diaspora 'particularly acute since it is charged with anxieties about losing access to the parents' past as a consequence of displacement and amnesia linked to trauma' (Berghahn 2013, p.90). Such

excavations into one's family and cultural history thus involve journeys into the past whether in the form of a dramatisation, re-enactment of an experience, a return to the country or place of origin, the recalling of memories through family testimony or the appropriation of cultural artefacts out of the family archive. My own film practice engages in such excavations connecting family memory with histories of the Iranian diaspora.

The Iranian diaspora is a relatively recent phenomenon and emerged as a consequence of the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the corresponding developments in their aftermath that resulted in the migration and dispersal of millions of Iranians around the globe.[1] In the 1980s, there was little cohesion amongst Iranian exiles due to political disagreements (rooted in the fallouts during and after the revolution) between leftist, pro-royalist, pro-Mujahedin and pro-Islamist groups as well as anticipations of a return to Iran. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, Iranians have established firmer roots in their host countries following the emergence of a second generation of the diaspora (Raji 2010, p.194). My practice engages with my family's experience of this history, exploring memories from before and after the revolution, our displacement and resettlement in Britain and our everyday life today. As part of this process, much of my work appropriates family archive material. *Baba* (2011) explores the sense of defeat experienced by secular Iranian exiles who were engaged in leftist and socialist organisations prior to the revolution. The story is structured around a photograph of my father and uncle posing in front of a leftist revolutionary poster following their release as political prisoners in Iran in 1978 under the military dictatorship of the Shah. *Where is My Mother's House* (2012) focuses on my mother's ethnic identity and memory through a travelogue of sorts following her search for her childhood home in Tabriz, the home of Iranian Azeris, who make up a third of Iran's population and where the majority language is the

[1] Current estimates vary widely over the size of the Iranian diaspora population globally, between 1 and 4 million (Raji 2010). In Britain, the 2011 census recorded 75,000 Iranian-born citizens in the United Kingdom but this does not account for the second or emerging third generation of Iranians in the diaspora. We can safely assume the number of people living in Britain with a claim to an Iranian identity to be higher than the figure offered by the most recent census.

Azerbaijani Turkish dialect popularly known as *Torki.* The film ends with a home movie portrait of her and her family in their home in the 1960s posing and smiling for the camera.

One central question that arises from my films is how the cultural artefacts and traditional amateur practices of family photography, home movies and videos are utilised in my own practice, and those of other diasporic filmmakers and domestic ethnographers. In what follows, I address some of these issues with reference to a more recent film, *Baba 1989* (2016), which juxtaposes my father's memories of arrival and settlement with a family home video. As we shall see, the film offers some insights into the practice and function/s of diasporic domestic ethnography in relation to these cultural artefacts.

Baba 1989 **(2016, 13 min)**

Baba 1989 is a single channel film constructed along three principal audio/visual tracks. The video track consists of a home video depicting my family – mother, father, two sisters and me – in a living room, gathering, gesturing and posing for a family portrait. At the most fundamental level it is a record of my family in a particular home environment in space and time: the living room of a one bed flat we occupied from 1989 until 1992. This home video footage plays out on a convex TV monitor-shaped screen framed by a black empty space. The TV switches on revealing fuzzy TV 'snow', a green play icon appears in the corner of the TV set before the video plays out, eventually cutting out and repeating two more times. Between the repeats and at other instances the video falters, stops, returns to snow, briefly freezes and rewinds.

The sound track combines two separate audio tracks. The first track is a musical score dubbed on to and playing off the video consisting of melancholic instrumental covers of two popular pre-revolutionary Iranian songs[2]. The first one of which plays once and the second one twice. The dubbed music also cuts out at times into silence or hiss, sometimes in line with the video and sometimes not. The second audio track consists of my father's account of arriving in Britain in 1989

[2] *Mara Beboos* [Kiss Me] and *Daryache Noor* [Lake of Lights], by violinist Farid Farjad from the album *Anroozha* [Those Days].

having spent four years separated from us, two of which were spent in Germany (as he could not get a visa to Britain initially). In contrast to the images of family togetherness, his testimony narrates the painful and traumatic experience of trying to reintegrate into the family unit following displacement and separation. In the discussion that follows, I begin by focusing on my motivations behind the recording of the testimony interview then move on to the functions of the home video, and how these two aspects relate to each other.

Family testimony

I came to Britain in 1985 from Iran as a five-year old along with my younger sister and mother to seek asylum from the horrors of the Iran-Iraq war. My older sister had come to Britain earlier with our grandmother. Not being able to secure a visa, my father initially remained in Iran migrating to Germany temporarily then to Britain in 1989. The emotional and psychological impact of this separation was not something we had discussed before as a family. I myself had never talked directly to my father about his experience from his perspective. The decision to do an interview with him about it offered, first and foremost, an opportunity to have that conversation. Without the context of an interview (albeit between father and son) I would find it difficult to approach my father about his feelings on the subject.

The interview focused on the personal memories and some historical context, my father's experiences in Germany, his experience of arriving in Britain and seeing us for the first time in four years and his decision to finally settle here. We began the interview by speaking in a mixture of Farsi and English but as the conversation developed my father increasingly spoke in English until eventually the whole interview was conducted entirely in English. There are a number of reasons for this. It was motivated, in part, by my father's desire to communicate more effectively to me. At the same time, it conveyed an understanding of the audience to which my father was potentially communicating. Furthermore, recalling his memories in English seemed to offer a way of disassociation, distancing and protecting himself from direct emotional engagement with me. This is

evidenced by the way he addresses me and my sisters in the third person, as 'my children', rather than in the second person. However, there is the occasional slip into 'you' or 'your mum' resulting from the 'co(i)mplication'[3] of domestic ethnography where the self is tied to the subject of enquiry (Renov 2004, p.218).

This intersubjective and intercultural context shapes the way in which my father's memory is brought into memory. According to Mieke Bal (1999) traumatic memory is 'solitary', 'inflexible and invariable', whereas narrative memory is active, situated in the present and socially constructed:

> it comes about in a cultural context whose frame evokes and enables memory. It is a context in which, precisely, the past makes sense in the present, to others who can understand it, sympathise with it, or respond with astonishment, surprise, even horror; narrative memory offers some sort of feedback that ratifies the memory (Bal, 1999, p.x).

For Bal, a traumatic past event needs to be made 'narratable' in order for it to 'enter memory'. Such a process requires the presence of a second-person as witness, an exchange that sets 'in motion the emergence of a narrative' (1999, x). That is, the act of recollection needs a corresponding act of witnessing to facilitate the memorialisation. This narrative memory is constituted through the cultural context of such an exchange, especially when the witnessing of this process involves mediation through art. My role as second-person witness is more co(i)mplicated as I had my own childhood memories of my father's arrival and the difficulties of us reconnecting with one another given the four years of separation. The articulation of my father's memories, however, allowed me to recall vicariously through him. Domestic ethnography is, to restate, a form of self-exploration with 'recourse to the familial other' (Renov, 2004, p.218). If there was no recording device present then this intersubjective exchange between my father and me would simply be a conversation between a father and a son. However, as mentioned, it was the recording device that enabled such a

[3] A useful term used by Renov (2004), and taken up by Lebow (2008), to encapsulate the 'complexity and interpenetration of subject/object identities' (Renov, 2004, p.218).

conversation to take place. The inclusion of the recording device introduces another witness, an audience beyond the confines of the spare room of my parents' home, turning it into a public space through which we could perform this act of memory. This public display is then a therapeutic act, allowing my father to share and narrate his memories to me through a performance for others.

One of the functions of domestic ethnography is internal to the family, in that it can be used to address unresolved questions and allow the context for narrative memories to emerge, and to be articulated and exchanged. But the intercultural context of an intergenerational exchange within the diaspora, can inflect the form through which the memory comes into being. In this case, it was through my father's Iranian-accented English.

Accented speech and bilingual language is a prominent feature in diasporic films, to the extent that Naficy (2001) has adapted it from a linguistic phenomenon into a theory of diasporic films themselves. Films made in exile and diaspora, for Naficy, are 'accented' not just in their dialogue and speech but fundamentally at the level of form (aesthetics, choice of subject matter, narrative structure), inflecting the dominant cinematic language in a host country through their feeling structures of displacement and deterritorialisation. In this model, a film's 'accent' arises from the 'interstitial' spaces its filmmaker occupies in cinema and society (2001, p.10). In diaspora, the experience of displacement is not only one of the causes of emotional scars that require healing, but displaced settings also shape the form and language within which that healing takes place and is brought into cultural memory. We might say the practice of domestic ethnography is 'accented' by, and within, displacement.

Having served its initial purpose, the recording of my father's testimony remained on my computer hard drive for several months until I edited into a film. Despite the intent to communicate beyond the family, it is often the case that the filmed or recorded material, including testimony or interview, simply becomes another contribution to a vast and expanding family archive of photographs, home movies and videos and other filmed material. While domestic ethnography's unique intersubjectivity means the lines between the subject and object are blurred, this process

applies not only to the encounter with the family member on camera but to the construction and excavation of the family archive. This is because every domestic ethnographic project is, at one and the same time, a contribution to the memory and history of the family.

Family archive and memory

Conventionally, the history and memory of the family is constructed, in part, through the practice of family photography and home movies, a highly coded and selective form of visual communication as many scholars have shown (Bourdieu, 1990; Chalfen, 1987; Moran, 2002; Ruoff, 1991; Sontag, 1977; Zimmermann, 1995). Visual anthropologist Richard Chalfen has termed these forms of 'interpersonal communication' centred on everyday life as the 'home mode of communication' (1987, p.8). While home mode artefacts such as home movies lack professional conventions, are rarely edited and have little or no need for character or plot development, they function entirely sufficiently for their intended audience: the family insider. In their ritual function they portray and record special events, celebrations, temporal milestones and leisurely activities such as weddings, birthdays, graduations, a new house and holidays. They also play a particularly important cultural function in articulating, mediating and perpetuating family memories across generations offering evidence of people and places, kinship and generational continuity (Moran, 2002; Ruoff, 1991). Nevertheless, they are not a reliable record of family memory and history for they often entirely exclude the trauma, hostility and tensions of family life. However, the in-group family viewer can (sometimes) still read repressed associations and incidents into the images denied by the form (Ruoff, 1991, p.11). For example, Michelle Citron found little correspondence between her family home movies and her own childhood recollections of family life and this discrepancy formed the basis of her much-cited domestic ethnographic film *Daughter Rite* (1979).

In diaspora, these selective cultural artefacts take on renewed significance when the continuities of family life and memory have been disrupted by social upheavals and displacement because 'without the dynamic reconstitution and articulation of the past in acts of memory there

would be no sense of continuity, community and identity' (Berghahn, 2013, p.85). The family home video that appears in *Baba 1989* is particularly precious because it is the only footage myself and my family have of that period. While it ignites memories and associations, the footage itself is not an entirely reliable document of our family life at that time (as migrants living in poor and cramped conditions). However, the video is revealing in many other ways.

Ostensibly to possess any filmed footage at all of my family during this period should represent some form of economic and social capital.[4] But as an asylum-seeking family living in poverty we did not own a camcorder. The presence of all of us within the frame means someone outside of the family circle was filming. In fact, it was a parent from the school we attended who was doing a film course at the time. We are therefore not entirely in control of the means of production and consequently our self-representation. Consequently, rather than a record of a special event, the film recording was an event in itself, presenting the opportunity to be filmed and to see a filmed representation of ourselves. This precipitated a performance of the home mode in its most elementary and conventional form: as a family portrait. Much to the insistence of my mother and father (and the person behind the camera) we eventually gather together on the sofa and smile, conveying an image of family unity and harmony. In her study of 1950 American home movies, *Reel Families*, Patricia Zimmerman notes the absence of the father as an indicator of patriarchal control over the representation of the family through the wielding of the camera (1995, p.113). We might say my father's presence in this footage represents his more diminished social status because, in another setting, he might have owned and controlled the means of production by which the family was represented.

Much has been written on the social function of family photographs (Bourdieu, 1990; Chambers, 2001; Hirsch, 1997). Family photography reinforces 'the integration of the family group by reasserting the sense that it has both of itself and of its unity' (Bourdieu, 1990, 19). These selective depictions of togetherness capture 'what families aspire to, rather than what they actually

[4] With reference to his own films, for example Fung sees possession of home movie footage of Third world countries in the 1950s as an indicator of social privilege rather than commonality (2008, 39).

are' (Berghahn, 2013, p.92) and thus function in normalising the mythological construction of the modern family. In reducing 'the strains of family life by sustaining an imaginary cohesion, even as it exasperates them by creating images that real families cannot uphold' (Hirsch, 1997, p.7) the family photograph constructs an idea of togetherness that has played an ideological role. As Deborah Chambers (2001) has argued about the 1950s family album, narrativising 'a sense of unity, heritage, connectedness, intimacy and spatial belonging' was an ideological device where families colluded in representations of an ideal modern family, 'authenticating public discourses of familial heritage, blood ties, continuity and connection within a private cultural form' thereby 'transforming nuclearised parenthood into spectacle'. This 'icon of conformity' was a way in which ordinary families manufactured familiness and reproduced the 'myth of the happy family' (Chambers, 2001, p.75). Similarly, for Zimmerman, amateur filmmaking was 'domesticated' into the home movie over time, curtailing its radical potential as a means of creative expression and co-opted into a private leisure activity. By the 1950s it had succumbed to the narrow objectives of 'familialism', an ideology that promoted the 'integrated nuclear family unit' as the ideal norm (1995, p.122).

These views are principally formulated with reference to family photographs and the home movie on celluloid film and focused on middle class American lives in the 1950s and 1960s. Against what he sees as a transhistorical and technologically-determinist view of the home mode, James Moran (2002) adopts a dialogical approach in his study of home video. Resolving the contradictions between the view of the home mode as an autonomous cultural and ritualistic function focused around kinship and community, and the 'dominant-ideology thesis' of its socially constructive functions, Moran conceives the home mode as a changing form of media production for representing everyday life which responds to the social, cultural and technological environment. By offering a means through which to negotiate the demands of our 'public, communal, and private, personal identities' the home mode 'constructs an image of home as a cognitive and affective foundation situating our place in the world' and 'provides a narrative format for communicating family legends and personal stories' (2002, p.59-61). Rooted in traditional cultural practices such as

family folklore, the home mode performs its functions not in some vacuum but in relation to historically changing circumstances including new family formations and technologies, such as the emergence of television.[5] In this schema, early domestic television programmes and serials such as *An American Family* (1973) were influenced by the cultural form and functions of the home movie while, reciprocally, anticipating familial desire for self-representation on a television screen in home videos. Furthermore, in contrast to the celluloid of home movie production, video's extended recording time, cheap cost, capacity to be recycled, sensitivity to low-light for indoor filming offered an increased repertoire and integration into the practices and documentation of everyday life. Unlike the home movie where the film had to be developed and later projected on a screen in a darkened room (synonymous with cinema) the home video catered to domesticity in a more continuous way: available to be watched immediately on a TV monitor, and thus, closing 'the gap between production and reception' to the point where viewers could watch themselves being recorded, offering a 'self-conscious reflexivity foregrounding the theatricality inherent in the home mode' (2002, p.42). The greater accessibility and spectrum of the everyday made possible by video camcorders was suited to the emergence of new households or domestic relations not based on blood ties and kinship but constructed between individuals through communal choice – of 'families we choose' (Kath Weston, 1991).

In my family's home video, the performance is structured by the combination of technological possibilities of video and our social and cultural experiences as immigrants. Because it is shot on video, we are able to view our own representation live as it is being recorded on a TV monitor in the corner of the room. As a result, our performance is variously exaggerated and passive and withheld, due to the self-awareness this evokes. Seeing herself on the screen, my older sister exits midway and returns wearing make-up. She blows a kiss into camera à la Marilyn Monroe. My younger sister and I pull faces at the camera. My mother looks at the screen and smiles slightly

[5] See Van Dijck (2005) for a discussion on the 'home mode' in the age of digital production with reference to *Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki, 2003), its remediation of analogue forms, the multimedia possibilities of the DVD and the interactive implications of its internet presence. Of course the home mode's discursive environment is even more plural today with new and social media including smart phones.

embarrassedly when the video zooms in on her and she notices its invasiveness. When the camera zooms into my father he reacts by attempting to embrace my sisters. They in turn are embarrassed and pull away. These responses draw attention to how we perform family togetherness and unity and construct an image of ourselves.

As Moran argues, such a self-image 'fluctuates in an intertextual context' with domestic television (as well as other popular discourses such as lifestyle magazines) through the shared concerns of private family lives and recognisable characters, whose pasts, presents and futures are played out on a small screen in close proximity and on a repetitive basis via a serial aesthetic (2002, p.106). Our family had never seen a filmed representation of ourselves on our own television screen or any other. The family lives we watched in domestic soap operas such as *Eastenders* or *Neighbours* were far removed from our experience as a migrant family in poverty. Reports around this period showed that television was failing to reflect the experience of ethnic minorities (Morley, 2000, p.121). This is true not least for Iranians whose representations were dominated by news images of the Iran-Iraq war and 'the Rushdie affair'[6] and films like *Not Without My Daughter* (1988), in which Iranians are portrayed as traditional, patriarchal and violent.

The family portrait in *Baba 1989* also reminds us of the limitations of the postmodern discursive model of 'families we choose', because as Chambers has argued it 'hides class and ethnic factors through its emphasis on *choice*' (2001, p.138) ignoring the material factors and structures involved in the available spectrum of lifestyle decisions. Despite huge social and cultural changes, 'choosing' one's family remains a limited option for the many, not least for asylum seekers in 1989.

Hence the family's response to its own representation on a television screen must also be seen in the context of displacement, media under-representation and stereotyping. As a functional form for expressing unity and togetherness, the home mode in diaspora offers not only continuity over the discontinuity of displacement but a means for self-representation and belonging in the

[6] Referring to the controversy in 1989 around the publication of Salman Rushdie's bookthe *Satanic Verses,* the offence it caused within Muslim communities and the *fatwa* issued by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini's calling for the killing of Salman Rushdie in response. Khomeini died later that year.

context of mis-representation and exclusion. At the same time, in doing so, it can elide the traumatic tensions that underlie this experience by constructing a myth of cohesion. Consequently, the contextualisation of these cultural artefacts and preservation of these memories becomes an important political impulse within diasporic domestic ethnography.

Berghahn's term for films that chronicle parents' migratory memories and histories as 'postmemory documentaries' (2013, p.85) is useful here. The term 'postmemory' derives from a concept that Marianne Hirsch (1997) introduced to describe how memories are passed on between generations. For Hirsch, while 'postmemory' is a powerful form of memory, it is distinguished 'from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection', where the connection to the object or person is 'through an imaginative investment and creation' rather than through recollection:

> Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by the narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated (1997, p.22).

Hirsch uses the concept of postmemory specifically to describe the experience of descendants of Holocaust survivors, but suggests the idea arguably relates to 'other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences' (1997, p.22). Indeed, much of my film practice has been engaged with and interested in the postmemories of events that precede my birth and of my parents' experience and their own memories of the Iranian revolution.

One of the functions of my postmemory films, and those of others, is to utilise family photographs and home movies not so much as a way of questioning their coded meanings (although this is often the case), but as a means through which to illicit some empathy with the traumatic

experience of displacement amongst viewers in the immediate environment and outside of the family circle. In my case this is driven, in part, as a response to the ways in which such identifications have been absent from official and dominant representations of Iranians in Britain.

As Berghahn argues, the 'communicative intent' behind postmemory documentaries is that they engage in the process of excavation and reconstruction of their families' migratory histories arising from the exclusion of their 'collective pasts' from 'official memory of the host society' (2013, p.86) and it is here that the 'implicit political relevance' of these films lies:

> for the disclosure of familial memories in the public sphere is no longer just a family affair […] By privileging the memories of first-generation immigrant fathers and mothers, the films challenge inequities of power and visibility, and rescue hitherto untold stories from oblivion […] They make an impassioned plea for the inclusion of memories of the marginalised and the pluralisation of the cultural memory of the host nation (2013, p.116).

As such, the filming and performance of our family home video, and the motivations behind its inclusion and narrativisation in *Baba 1989* through family testimony, are defined by the cultural specifities of diasporic displacement. It would thus be useful to consider the result of their juxtaposition in *Baba 1989* and the ways in which it is orientated within and beyond the family.

Diasporic domestic imaginaries

How those within and outside the family view the home mode is central to their form of expression and communication. Family photographs elicit what Hirsch calls the *affiliative look*, which 'sutures' the in-group viewer into the image (Hirsch, 1997, p.93). But as Elspeth kydd (2012) argues with reference to her own home movies, a guest viewer can access familial affiliation through shared

viewing as guest, temporarily sutured into the affiliative gaze of another. Indeed, the home mode is part of a communicative experience of collective viewing with others: whether in the form of the family album, the home movie in a dark room, the home video on a TV monitor, the uploading of videos and pictures on social media platforms, or their editing in such a way that makes them interesting to an outsider. Images of our families are mediated by the narrative and social environment (speaking, discussing, editing, captioning, storytelling) in which those images are consumed. Thus my father's edited, voice-over testimony not only contextualises the footage, but, against a TV monitor playing a home video, it also offers an affiliative connection to the home video through the connotations and memories that viewers associate with the collective viewing of a video.

As family insiders, domestic ethnographers are well-positioned to expose what is excluded by the home mode through their internal access and knowledge of what is hidden and by their ethnographic imperatives. Annette Kuhn (2002) has shown how one can draw out coded meanings and secrets from family photographs through what she calls 'memory-work'. For Kuhn, the process of looking through them and filling in the lapses and omissions becomes, like detective work, an archaeological pursuit (2002, p.4). Some documentary filmmakers, such as Alan Berliner, Michelle Citron, Richard Fung and Rea Tajiri, have recontextualised and deconstructed the coded meanings of their home movies by means of repetition, freeze-frame, voice-over, emotional music cues, and in juxtaposition to differing narrative, imagery or sounds (Renov, 2008, p.61). As kydd notes, the images in the home mode are reframed in the context of filmmakers' different forms of experience. Whereas Jarecki invites viewers to look for evidence of abuse in *Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki, 2003) or in *Tarnation* (Jonathan Caouette, 2003) the audience sees effects of mental illness, kydd looks for 'the stories of diaspora and displacement' in her own home mode images (2012, p.197). kydd's own experimental diasporic autobiography, *Stone Street* (2014), juxtaposes poetic reflections on home with a rich layer of home movies, videos and interviews. There is an attempt here to piece together fragments of a scattered home together, in order to make a 'virtual home'

(kydd, 2012, p.198). In *I is for India* (2005) Sandhya Suri's father's home movies document their immigrant lives in Britain and offer a 'reverse ethnography' of life in England (for relatives in India). This is intercut with racist and condescending television programmes such as *Dark Million* (BBC 1966) that targeted them as a new community in Britain (Lebow, 2012, p.224).

In *Baba 1989*, the performative nature of family unity and belonging in the video is recontextualised by my father's voice-over testimony, which draws out the psychological experience of resettlement. He describes how when he first arrived his memories of us were different, we reacted to him like a stranger. He could not speak English, we could not really speak Farsi, and any notion of a father-child relationship had broken down. He then speaks of my mother, how she had changed and how she no longer was interested in her Iranian culture. He suggests this is related to the restrictions on women in Iranian society and how when they leave they are 'happy with this change'. His detachment from us, he continues, was also exasperated by lack of work, money, the place we were living, and the void of any social life or ability to connect to anyone. This made him consider for a long time the possibility of going back to Iran but eventually he decided to stay and forced himself to build a life here. The family's performance of togetherness in the home video, then, stands in contrast to the feelings he expresses of being excluded from both the family and the new society into which he has arrived. The testimony exposes the constructed nature of the family's performance while the family's performance expresses the lack in my father's sense of belonging.

Migration discourses focused around the trauma or crisis of family separation and reunification can end up, as Anne-Marie Fortier argues, reifying the patriarchal family as an 'emblem of belonging for people lost in a new country' (2000, p.62) by restoring the family as a 'harmonious unit of self-support and emancipation' (2000, p.63). In contrast, my film posits my father's decision to settle as incongruous, a decision to which he eventually, somewhat uncomfortably and unwillingly, succumbs. It stands in contrast to migration narratives of fathers as the patriarchal agents of change, who arrive first (to get work and establish roots) and are followed later by their family for whom they seek to provide. Furthermore, the performance of family harmony described

earlier is accentuated through the repetition of the home video, foregrounding the ways in which such a representation of the family as a coherent unit, and the memory of it in this formulation, is constructed. Similarly, the faltering, pausing and rewinding of the video reveals it as an artificial construct of memory. Equally, the first score juxtaposed to my father's testimony stops with the faltering of the tape, removing its initial role as emotive colour to his memory and instead into the diagesis of the film as a conscious part of the narrativisation. The repetition of the second track reinforces this point and contributes to the tension between continuity and change in his story. In turn, the performative nature of the family home video raises questions about the authority and veracity of my father's testimony and to what extent it too is omissive or selective as a form of recollection.

Baba 1989 thus pluralises the official history of the family by including the trauma denied by the form, contributing recontextualised and re-edited material to the family's archive and consequently to the image it has of itself, but it does so by questioning its authenticity as narrative memory in the process. Furthermore, the contribution to the family history it makes is not closed or complete. As Kuhn has said, memory does not simply '*involve* forgetting, misremembering, repression...it *is* actually these processes, it is always already secondary revision' (2002, p.158). Because domestic ethnographic films have an intersubjective relationship to the home mode of communication – from which they excavate material and contribute new content – they can adopt the cyclical narrative of the home mode's serial, open-ended characteristic that is common in domestic television soap operas and family albums (Kuhn, 2002; Moran, 2002). How *Baba 1989* is watched, discussed, appropriated, revised, re-edited and/or discounted within and beyond the family is part of its mode of communication.

Conclusion

Domestic ethnography is orientated both inside and outside of the family circle and this dual orientation has increased significance in diaspora, where the emphasisis on exploration and

preservation of memories of displacement can rely on home mode artfefacts, the primary visiual records of family memory. Family portraits, movies and videos play an important role in overcoming discontinuities of displacement, anxieties of loss or memories of a (traumatic) past, parents' and grandparents' migratory memories and histories. Postmemory documentaries allow ways to examine these memories, to relive trauma of past ancestors through the affiliative and imaginative connections made possible in the traces and fragments available in photographs, testimonies, artefacts and objects. Threatened with expulsion and separation from a homeland or family ties, there is a desire in diasporic domestic ethnography towards reconciliation and reunion with past lives and homes. As Berghahn (2013) has argued, there is an urge in these films for a greater inclusion of migrant histories within the official cultural memories of the host society.

Baba 1989 utilises the domestic family portrait as a device of belonging, memory, space and place. But as the only filmed record of that period, like other home mode artefacts, its performance of belonging offers a selective and unreliable depiction of our domestic life in that period, excluding the trauma and anxieties of an asylum seeking family. Social critiques of the home mode briefly discussed in this chapter have primarily focused on the *familial* ideological functions that naturalise the nuclear family. But while the portrait in *Baba 1989* appears to adhere to a classical nuclear model, the intersection of home video technology and racial experiences of exclusion in displacement complicate the construction of family belonging on screen.

By communicating outside the family circle, domestic ethnographies like *Baba 1989* narrativise and contextualise home mode artefacts drawing out hidden meanings, omitted stories and events. In *Baba 1989*, my father's memories in voiceover lie in tension with the performance of family belonging on screen. As such, his testimony pluralises not only the home video's representational function (as a generic family portrait) but also in what it returns to the family archive as the record of its own memory. Indeed, domestic ethnography is not just a one-way recording of a family member's account or experience. In its reframing of home mode artefacts it

too becomes another home mode artefact, a record of family history, albeit an uncomfortable one. In this way, it contributes to the image the family has of itself, pluralising its memories for future generations. In diasporic, domestic ethnography, feelings of togetherness evident in home mode practices have, therefore, a complex currency.

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